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Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
Committee on Appropriations
Washington, DC 20515-6015

May 4, 2004

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CLERK AND STAFF DIRECTOR
JAMES W. DYER

TELEPHONE:
(202) 225-2771

The Honorable Ann Veneman
Secretary
U.S. Department of Agriculture
Washington, D.C. 20250

Dear Madam Secretary,

We are writing to you and the Secretary of the Interior to express our deep concern for the upcoming wildfire season. We note that there are widespread predictions that this will be an intense wildfire season in western States due to the continuing drought and high fuel levels. We also note that tremendous damage and high costs can occur when wildfires grow large and complex; there isn't much that can be done when wildfires become severe. This makes it all the more vital that the Federal and State wildfire suppression forces be well prepared and positioned ahead of time. Accordingly, we are asking that you and the Secretary of the Interior provide us with a coordinated update about your current readiness status for the upcoming wildfire season and the preparedness levels of the Federal firefighters and your critical State partners. Please include detailed information concerning your hiring and training of seasonal personnel, and progress in securing contracts for additional workforce, and with other major contracting efforts. Please also provide an update on the status of your aviation program this year, including a summary of your efforts to deal with urgent air tanker safety issues. You should also update us on your efforts to implement wildfire suppression cost containment measures.

If there is any additional assistance we in the Congress can provide, we would appreciate communications to that effect. We request a briefing on this situation as soon as possible, as the wildfire season will not wait on our inactivity. We are ready to work with you to help implement a more efficient, cost-effective wildfire program to protect communities and natural resources by implementing the National Fire Plan.

Thank you for your assistance.

Norm Dicks

Norman Dicks
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Interior
and Related Agencies

Sincerely,

Charles H. Taylor

Charles H. Taylor
Chairman
Subcommittee on Interior
and Related Agencies

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The Honorable Gale Norton
Secretary
U.S. Department of the Interior
Washington, D.C. 20250

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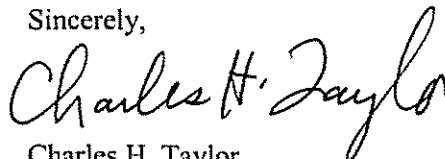
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